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UNCLAS MANAMA 000399

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

NEA/PI-CBOURGEOIS; NEA/PPD-MQUINN AND APENDLETON;  
NEA/ARN, NEA/ARP CKANESHIRO

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: QEXC SCUL KMPI KPAO KDEM BA  
SUBJECT: MEPI'S "MY ARABIC LIBRARY" - BAHRAIN MINISTRY  
OF EDUCATION REQUESTS MORE INFO

REFS: A) STATE 15320, B) BEIRUT 623,  
C) WENGER/BOURGEOIS EMAILS, D) MANAMA 375

¶11. (U) This is an action request for NEA/PI; please  
see para 6.

¶12. (U) PAO has met twice with senior Ministry of  
Education officials in Bahrain about the MEPI Arabic  
language early reading book program (on February 22 and  
March 16). The Assistant Undersecretary for Curriculum  
and Training told PAO and APAO on March 16 that the  
Ministry had not yet made a decision about  
participating in the program. The Ministry would  
welcome a visit from a Scholastics Book Representative  
who would provide further information about the books,  
including a proposed list of titles and sample  
translations.

¶13. (U) It is post's understanding that Ms. Michelle  
Alwan, Middle East Area Sales Manager of Scholastics  
Books, will visit the region in April/May. Post  
recommends that she visit Bahrain with further  
information about the project, including the proposed  
list of books and samples of books that have already  
been translated.

¶14. (SBU) It seems that "My Arabic Library" has been  
the talk of the Ministry. The Assistant Undersecretary  
told the PAO that a number of Ministry staff have  
expressed serious concerns about the project during  
internal meetings, and some have come out completely  
against the project. The Assistant Undersecretary  
supports the project, stating, "These people are living  
in the past - aren't these just children's bedtime  
stories?" He cautioned, however, that the Minister  
will decide only after he has met with Alwan and seen a  
list of the books. During a separate meeting about the  
GLOBE Program on March 21, the Director of Intermediate  
and Secondary Education in Bahrain, the official  
responsible for all public high schools and middle  
schools in the country, surprised the APAO and PAS FSN  
by bringing up "My Arabic Library" and stating that he  
was not supportive of the idea. He said, "We have been  
discussing this new Arabic Books Program from America.  
We have our own books that reflect our culture and  
traditions, there is little need for us to import."  
(Comment: This individual has been extremely  
supportive of the GLOBE Program, and is not anti-  
American.) Further, during a round table discussion at  
Al Wasat Arabic newspaper two weeks ago, Charge and  
Emboffs were surprised when a representative from an  
Islamist political society who works at the Ministry of  
Education, used "My Arabic Library" as an example of an  
educational reform program being imposed by the USG on  
the Gulf, as reported in reftel D.

¶15. (SBU) PAO informed the Assistant Undersecretary  
that per ref A, para 7, "acknowledgement of MEPI  
sponsorship of the Program would likely be printed on  
the inside of the books." Given the sensitivities  
surrounding the program, he recommended not overtly  
identifying the books as receiving U.S. funding. He  
stated, "Good work speaks for itself and teachers,  
parents, and students could react negatively to this  
program if it seemed to have political connotations.  
Stamping the book cover would be counterproductive to  
the purpose of the program. Arabs want to preserve  
their cultures and politicizing a reading program  
equals indoctrination in the viewpoint of many.  
Politicizing a reading program takes away its  
substance." (Comment: This official has been  
extremely supportive of all MEPI initiatives, and he  
personally supports My Arabic Library. End Comment.)

¶16. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Please advise Alwan's  
travel dates to Bahrain so post can request a meeting  
with the Minister of Education for Alwan to present the  
requested information. Charge Ford and PAO will  
accompany Alwan on the meeting. Post further requests  
that Alwan be prepared to inform the Minister exactly

how U.S. support/funding for the books will be identified.

FORD